

VZCZCXRO9785
RR RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHBUL #2104/01 2110411
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 300411Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0431
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 002104

DEPARTMENT FOR SRAP, SCA/FO, SCA/A, EUR/RPM
STATE PASS TO AID FOR ASIA/SCAA
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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: PRT Mazar-e-Sharif: Sar-e-pul Provincial Assessment

REF: Kabul 1735

Summary

1. (SBU) Security throughout most of Sar-e-pul province remains relatively good, but has worsened in areas bordering neighboring Jowzjan and Faryab provinces. Almalek village of Sayyad district has been ground zero for Mullah Nadir's insurgent gangs, who continue to exploit the weaknesses of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), particularly their inability to coordinate operations across provincial borders with their counterparts in Faryab and Jowzjan. Despite a rocky start to his tenure, Governor Chayabi has established productive working relationships with his administration and provincial council members. One of the least developed provinces in the country, Sar-e-pul has not finalized its provincial development plan and is struggling to attract reconstruction projects from the national development budget and from donors.

Security

2. (SBU) The story emerging over the past several months has been the emergence of Mullah Nadir and his roving gangs of armed men as a destabilizing force in the northwestern part of the province. Nadir, a Tajik criminal who has been on the run ever since murdering an Afghan policeman two years ago, uses Almalek village, Sayyad district, as his operating base. He has spent time in Pakistan and is believed to be receiving support from the Taliban. ANSF officials hold him accountable for the March murders of the district governor, police chief, and nine policemen from adjacent Qush Teppeh district in Jowzjan province. Mullah Amrullah, a Nadir associate, has reportedly reconciled with the government. The provincial intelligence chief said that he will be keeping an eye on him to make sure he is not playing both sides.

3. (SBU) Two ANSF-led operations supported by ISAF since then were unsuccessful largely due to the lack of effective cross-border cooperation with the Jowzjan and Faryab ANSF. Consequently, this has provided a morale boost to Nadir, who enjoys freedom of movement precisely because the undermanned Afghan National Police (ANP) are unable to man and support a check post there without fear of being overrun by Nadir's armed gangs. Both Chayabi and his deputy believe that the ANP's morale has bottomed to the point where they are too scared to fight the insurgency in Sayyad. The recent deployment to Sar-e-pul of a company of 120 Afghan National Army soldiers to help provide election security is an encouraging development, but they are expected to stay only for a few months.

4. (SBU) The security picture throughout the rest of the province is incomplete. There have been two IED finds along the paved road connecting Sheberghan, Jowzjan province, with Sar-e-pul's provincial center. Apart from another IED found in Sancharak district last February, there have been no other reported significant security incidents either there or in the districts of Sozma Qala and Gosfandi since the beginning of 2009. Balkhab district, home to

large pockets of ethnic Hazaras, remains calm. Little is known about the smuggling networks which are widely believed to be intact in the province despite assertions to the contrary by Chayabi. The Swedish PRT, operating from its safehouse in Sar-e-pul's provincial center, is only collecting intelligence in the northern-most part of Kohistanat district - the most remote in the province. There, insurgents are spilling over not only from Sayyad district but also from Belcharagh district in Faryab province and seeking refuge in the mountains. The attempted assassination by of the Kohistanat district governor earlier this spring attests to deteriorating security conditions in certain parts of the district.

15. (SBU) Sar-e-pul's provincial elections officer is an experienced IEC hand, yet he worries about the safety of voting centers in Almalek, Chartut and other trouble-prone villages of Sayyad district because of their poor security. The Sar-e-pul police chief is worried by the police manpower needed to support the 136 voting centers province-wide. With only 500 men in the force, he will need support from Kabul or from the Afghan army in order to place, on average, ten policemen per voting center, for a total of 1,360 men. As per an order from the Ministry of Interior, Sar-e-pul's ANP will recruit 100 ANP soldiers and send them to work in Kabul.

16. (SBU) Sar-e-pul's ANSF are making the transition, albeit not seamlessly, from the Joint Provincial Coordination Center to the Provincial Operations Coordination Center (OCC-P). The Afghan National Army brigadier general who arrived to head the center will have to learn how to forge teamwork among his 37-man staff of ANA, ANP, and NDS (national intelligence) personnel. U.S. military-funded MPRI trainers will train the OCC-P staff for two weeks, and the U.S. Police Mentoring Team (PMT), newly arrived to the province, will provide follow-on mentoring. INL-funded Dyncorps

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mentors continue to work with provincial police staff on such systems as personnel and logistics, but the mentors' effectiveness is hampered by their contractual restrictions on travel. Without accommodations in Sar-e-pul, the mentors must make day trips from Mazar-e Sharif. A round-trip takes six hours, which does not leave much time for quality mentoring. The European Union Police (EUPOL) has not assigned personnel to work in the province, but the Swedish PRT's police liaison officer helps out when he can.

Governance

17. (SBU) Governor Chayabi, a former mujahideen commander from Takhar province, made his debut on the governance stage last August to less than rave reviews. After a rough first few months, which saw him alienate his own deputy and the Provincial Council, Chayabi seems to be settling into the job. Fortunately, he has heeded advice from his own advisor about the importance of consulting with other members of his administration and the Provincial Council (PC) before making key decisions. Since then, he has improved relations with both groups and has even instituted an "open door" policy for anyone from the province wishing to meet him. As a mujahideen commander, Chayabi had a history of narco-trafficking from Takhar province to Tajikistan. Although allegations of his continuing involvement in illicit activity occasionally surface, no smoking gun has been uncovered to implicate him.

18. (SBU) The Provincial Council, as in most other provinces, has struggled to find its voice and role at times. Led by Mr. Azizi, who is also the provincial head of the Junbesh Party, the PC is now on better terms with the governor after a rocky start to their relationship. Governor Chayabi seems to have made amends for his early missteps and has since accepted invitations to lunch with PC members in their office. All but one of the council members intend to run again in this year's PC elections.

19. (SBU) The three-decades-long conflict between ethnic Arabs and the Pashtun Esaqzai tribe edged closer to resolution after Kabul authorities, with the governor's intervention, hammered out an agreement to resolve long standing land disputes between the two tribes before addressing the more complicated pending murder cases. Still, the road to final resolution is fraught with obstacles. The

release of convicted criminal Kamal Khan, who leads the Arab faction along with his brother, Member of Parliament Haji Payenda Khan, satisfies one of the agreement's conditions. However, the government is insisting on conducting a land survey to demarcate government-owned lands - a move both sides oppose for fear they will lose lands they have claimed illegally. The dispute is still pending with the National Reconciliation Committee, led by Meshrano Jirga (upper house) leader Mojdeddi.

¶10. (SBU) Sar-e-pul achieved poppy free status in 2008, entitling it to \$1.5 million in Good Performers Initiatives (GPI) projects. Among those projects are a provincial meeting hall in Sar-e-pul center and two schools. During a July visit to the province, Minister of Counter Narcotics Khodaidad announced that Sar-e-pul has again been declared poppy-free and will thus receive another \$1 million in 2009 GPI projects. The Provincial Development Committee (PDC) has decided that its 2009 GPI allocation should be used to asphalt roads in the provincial center. (NOTE: The minister's announcement was premature, as the U.N. Office of Drug Control has not yet released its province-by-province assessment of poppy cultivation. END NOTE) Governor Chayabi harbors no illusions that the ANP has stamped out all poppy cultivation in his province, and expects that due to the abundant rains this past spring, farmers will once again resort to planting poppy next year.

¶11. (SBU) Progress has been made on the DIAG (Disbanding of Illegal Armed Groups) process. Sancharak, Gosfandi, and Sozma Qala districts are DIAG-compliant. Balkhab is the next district slated to undergo DIAG.

Development

¶12. (SBU) Sar-e-pul is among the least developed provinces in Afghanistan. According to UNAMA's development assistance coordination officer in the north, who cites statistics from the Ministry of Finance, the total planned and committed government and donor spending per capita in Sari Pul province is around \$50 (compared with \$600 per capita in Kabul and \$400 in Helmand province). The southern districts of Balkhab and Kohistanat remain largely inaccessible during the winter months due to poor road conditions. Chayabi is under pressure from residents to attract development projects from donors and the central government, but so far has been unsuccessful. Natural gas and oil deposits are among the province's natural resources, but they remain unexploited. Sar-e-pul's 5-year Provincial Development Plan (PDP) is still a

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draft. Only two of 80 projects from its PDP have been completed: the construction of an office for the provincial attorney and the rehabilitation of a health clinic. The vast majority of projects on the draft PDP have not attracted donor funding. Approximately 75 percent of Sweden's development assistance to Afghanistan goes to support national-level programs. SIDA, the Swedish government's development agency, is funding a project to gravel 20 kilometers of road between Sar-e-pul center and Sozma Qala district.

¶13. (SBU) Prior to its termination in June, USAID's Local Governance-Community Development (LGCD) project focused on four priority districts: Gosfandi, Sozma Qala, Balkhab, and Sancharak. Vocational training projects planned in those districts have been cancelled. USAID is planning to construct a district center in Sancharak district with the funding mechanism not yet determined.

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